

# קהלת

THE HEBREW TEXT, AND A LATIN VERSION  
OF  
THE BOOK OF SOLOMON,  
CALLED  
ECCLESIASTES;  
WITH  
ORIGINAL NOTES,  
PHILOLOGICAL AND EXEGETICAL,  
AND A TRANSLATION OF THE COMMENTARY OF MENDLESSOHN  
FROM THE RABBINIC HEBREW.  
ALSO  
A NEWLY ARRANGED ENGLISH VERSION OF ECCLESIASTES, WITH  
INTRODUCTORY ANALYSES OF THE SECTIONS;  
TO WHICH IS PREFIXED  
A PRELIMINARY DISSERTATION.

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## THE PREFACE OF R. MOSES MENDELSSOHN.

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THE commentaries on our Holy Law, as is well known, follow four different methods, viz. those of simple, recondite, allegorical, and mysterious interpretation<sup>1</sup>. Now these four sorts of commentary are all to be regarded like the words of the living God, as all right and compatible one with another; nor is the fact of their being so contrary to good sense or analogy, or strange or surprizing to the human understanding, as I shall explain by the help of the Lord.

Now every discourse has a meaning agreeable to all the purposes of the speaker and hearer, and corresponding exactly with the succession and connexion of the things said, without exceeding or falling short of them; and this is called its primary meaning, and the exposition of this meaning is called **פְּשָׁת**. And with respect to this primary meaning our Rabbins said, “No passage of Scripture goes beyond its primary meaning<sup>2</sup>. ” The method of the **פְּשָׁת**, or exposition of the primary meaning, is to notice the meaning and not the words used in expressing it. Now as to sense, there is no difference between זֶבַר and שְׁבֵר; or again, between לֹא תִתְהִمֹּד and לֹא תִתְהִמְרוּ; for what is intended by them according to their primary meaning is in

<sup>1</sup> They are called in Hebrew **דָּרְשָׁנִים** and **פְּשָׁטוֹן**.

<sup>2</sup> אֲזַן מִקְרָא יוֹצֵא מִידֵי פְּשָׁטוֹן i. e. it exactly corresponds to it, and the text is always of the right length, and no more, to express it.

<sup>3</sup> These words occur in the corresponding accounts of the delivery of the law, to express corresponding ideas, in the part of Exodus called by the Jews the “section Jethro,” (i. e. several chapters, of which the 20th is one), and in Deuteronomy.

itself only one sense, as Rabbi Abraham Aben Ezra has explained at section Jethro. Now any one in conversation<sup>1</sup> is at liberty to employ synonymous terms or phrases, similar in sense, as he may think proper; and though in fact each of the synonymous nouns has its own peculiar shade of meaning which distinguishes it from its cognate word, so much so that two nouns will not be found expressing exactly the same thing, without any difference in force or want of force, or distinction in respect of modification of expression, and much less any two phrases be found entirely similar in signification; still sometimes this distinction is exceedingly small, so that with respect to the sense there is no use or importance in it, or it would be troublesome to the speaker or hearer to look to every single word in order to determine whether such an one would be more agreeable to the sense according to that subtle consideration; and then the speaker will employ either of the two synonymous words or phrases without discrimination, and with freedom and ease of speech; and thus sometimes they are employed for the elegancies of poetry, either for repeating the same meaning in different words after the manner of writers of songs, or in case the nature of the style should require the same subject to be mentioned two or three times, when it is for the beauty of the poetry to express it in different words, as is known to every beginner in the art of poetry and song. In short, the natural speaker for the most part considers the sense of what he says, and not the words he uses: and so it is with a prophet or one who speaks by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His first intention regards the sense with peculiar care, and arranges the words according to the beauty of language, and the elegancies of poetry and song, without appropriating a particular meaning or thing signified to each of all the varieties of expression.

But when the natural and human speaker discriminates and weighs the signification of each separate word in the scales of

<sup>1</sup> Literally, “master of a tongue.”

correctness, and without any licence, then he employs each of the words or phrases of similar meaning, and not its cognate word which resembles it in grammatical form and sense, not by chance or accident, or even by way of ornament or elegance, but to indicate and point out by means of it a particular meaning which he does not choose, or which it would not be right to explain with the full interpretation<sup>2</sup>, either for the sake of brevity, or for some other reason; and the thing signified by that refinement will be a sort of secondary meaning. And this the speaker intends to be taken not by itself, or as the primary meaning, but merely as a piece of subtlety and ingenuity<sup>3</sup>. As an instance of this, Judah said to Joseph, "Thou art as Pharaoh." Yarchi<sup>4</sup> interprets it thus, "Thou art accounted as a king in my eyes." This is its פשט or simple interpretation, and its מדרש or recondite interpretation is, "Thy end may be that thou mayest be smitten for him<sup>5</sup> with leprosy, as Pharaoh was on account of Sarah thy grandmother, &c." The first method is called the simple method of interpreting it, or its פשט; and it was clearly the primary meaning of the speaker, as appears from the connexion of the preceding and following events; since it was in fact the intention of Judah to plead with the lord of the land, but in fear and submission,

<sup>2</sup> **הַטְבָּה** is here used adverbially.

<sup>3</sup> Observe that Mendlessohn does not praise this or other absurdities which he quotes; he merely mentions them as specimens of the various kinds of commentary, the רמן פשט, &c.

<sup>4</sup> This is the name by which that distinguished commentator is usually known, and we have, therefore, adopted it in this place and elsewhere; but Wolfe has shown in his Bib. Rabb. that "רשי" is properly a contraction for ר' שלמה בן יצחק Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, and that the name Yarchi has crept in no one knows how, in the course of ages. Buxtorf says, "ר" שֶׁלְמָה יְרָחִי" is put for רשי which is wrong. For a short notice of his life, vid. p. 38, supra.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin.

as would be consistent with prudence and wisdom for a stranger in a strange land, not to speak harshly with him or provoke him, and consequently, it is evident that he meant to praise him in saying of him, “Thou art as Pharaoh;” but since he has expressed his words indefinitely, and has not said plainly, “Thou art a great prince, or regarded in my eyes as a king,” it would seem that the secondary meaning was to warn him, that even if he was of equal account with Pharaoh, he was not better than he, and that it was quite possible he might be plagued as Pharaoh was; and such is the way of the intelligent man, to moderate his expressions<sup>1</sup> before kings and great men of the earth, when he wishes to reprove them to their face, or to say before them a thing which will be unpleasing in their eyes. He cloaks his words under the cover of praise and flattery, and the wise ruler will apprehend their secondary meaning, and lay it to heart. Now there is no doubt that Judah said this to Joseph after the manner of a natural and human speaker, but that he nevertheless hinted at the secondary meaning, which is very much in agreement with the business in which he was engaged; but with respect to the connexion and succession of the events, we see that this was not the primary meaning.

Now as for him who speaks by prophecy or by the Holy Spirit, there is no doubt that nothing ever occurs in his discourse without its peculiar meaning, and if he chooses one of similar words or phrases, that he has some wish or purpose in so doing with regard to the sense, and consequently not only observes their meanings, but also the similarity and interchange which exists between them; and that all the changes of phrase, whether great or small, refer to a secondary meaning, even though that sometimes be remote from the primary meaning; and the interpretation of this secondary meaning is called **דרש** or recondite interpretation. An instance of this we have with regard to the words **זכור** and **שמר** and again **תתאוֹהָה**

<sup>1</sup> For the phrase **לכלכל דבריו** vid. Ps. cxii. 5.

and תחמוד, though according to the first meaning the thing signified by them be the same, still there can be no doubt that in the discourses of the great God, this change cannot occur by accident or chance, as we explained that it may in human speech, because Supreme Wisdom does nothing without a useful object and purpose; and again, we cannot attribute this change to beauty of poetry, since the intention of altering the expressions in Deuteronomy from what they were in Exodus, (section Jethro), was not to give sweetness of expression to the poetry by a change of words, and consequently it is evident that all this was for a peculiar purpose and meaning, viz. to raise the well-instructed and intelligent person to the meaning which they explain<sup>2</sup> minutely by one of the methods of recondite interpretation received among our nation; and consequently our wise men of blessed memory have done well in that they have commented reconditely according to these methods on the alteration and interchange between the first expressions and the latter, and all their words are true. Though the rule which Aben Ezra mentions be also true, that the Hebrew observes the sense and not the words; for the Rabbi spoke there only with reference to the primary meaning as we have described it, and you will find that our wise men themselves too sometimes mentioned the recondite interpretation, and afterwards asked פשטי דקרא במא כתיב “The simple interpretation of the text, how does that run?” as is seen in many places of the Talmud<sup>3</sup>. And consequently we see clearly that our wise men did not reject the simple interpretation and primary meaning which neglects the words and only observes the sense, although they took care also to notice the secondary meaning,

<sup>2</sup> i. e. is explained.

<sup>3</sup> He calls the Talmud הַשְׁשָׁה סִדְרִים i. e. <sup>הַשְׁשָׁה</sup> sex ordines vel partes operis Talmudici, i. e. the <sup>סִדְרִים</sup> זָרְעִים and טָהֳרוֹת.

which refinedly treats on every word and letter, or even horn of a letter<sup>1</sup>. For among the words of the living God nothing occurs accidentally, or without a meaning, just as he has created nothing in his world without a particular purpose, as is seen clearly by every intelligent person.

Now the distinguishing mark of the secondary meaning is, that the thing signified in it is not in accordance in every respect with all the intentions of the speaker and hearer, or with the whole connexion of the passage and its union with what precedes and follows. And sometimes the writer of recondite interpretation pays no regard or attention except to the phrase he is actually engaged with, and seeks a secondary meaning for it according to the customary methods by which the law is reconditely interpreted, although this meaning be not in accordance with the passages preceding and following, as it should be. And so you will find for the most part in the recondite commentaries of our sages, that they did not interpret by means of them the connexion of the verses, and their arrangement one after another, but wrote recondite commentaries on every single phrase by itself, and sought a secondary meaning in them; and the fact that there is no connexion or agreement between them, is not at all at variance with the method of the secondary meaning, as is known to every scholar.

<sup>1</sup> The horns of letters are the little corners which give them a finished appearance, as in the top of the letter ב. Buxtorf mentions the following curious passage on this subject. We give his words as they stand. In the Talmud. Menach. fol. 29, ii. בשענה שעלה משה למשה וקשור כתרים לאותיות &c. *למרום מצאו להקב"ה שיזבב וקשור כתרים לאותיות* i. e. Quo tempore ascendit Moses in altum invenit Deum sedentem et ligantem coronas ad literas (i. e. apices quibusdam literis inscribentem) et dixit ei, “Domine mundi, quis retardat manum tuam?” respondet Deus, “Homo quidam qui venturus est post multa secula, nomine Akiva ben Joseph, qui commentaturus est super unumquemque apicem literæ infinitos cumulos interpretationum.” These are the κεραυνοι “titles” mentioned in Matt. v. 18.

And accordingly you will see that Yarchi, the light of the captivity, who has proceeded in his commentary on the Bible<sup>2</sup> on the method of recondite interpretation, sometimes has explained each passage of scripture according to a sense separate and distinct from that of the passage which is next to it in place, without any connexion or union between them, as there ought to be according to the first meaning.

Now if the sense, as developed by the method of recondite interpretation, be derived from observation, not of the words and phrases in the way that we have described, but of beginnings and endings of words, their combination, their numerical value, and the points over the letters; and in short, if the meaning is reconditely interpreted from observation of the letters and points, that method of commentary is called רמז ; as in the word בְּהָבָרָם Gen. ii. 4<sup>3</sup>, (where the letter ה is written small), and they interpret this word, "he created them by the letter ה of his holy name יְהֹוָה." Again, at the passage in Gen. xxxii. 4, "ברַנְתִּי תְּרִיגָה" כֹּלֶמֶר עִם בֵּן נְרִתִי וְתְּרִיגָה מִצּוֹת שְׁמָרִתִי וְלָא בְּגִימְטְּרִיא תְּרִיגָה" Yarchi remarks, "ברַנְתִּי" is used after לְמֹדִתִי מִמְעָשָׂיו דְּרוּם "the method of גִּימְטְּרִיא or transposition of the same set of letters, and becomes therefrom תְּרִיגָה, and the meaning of the passage is, "I have sojourned with Laban, and kept

<sup>2</sup> Literally, "law, prophets, and Hagiographa."

<sup>3</sup> "In their being created."

<sup>4</sup> Or, "according to the letter כ," which is made up of separate lines, to indicate that the heavens and earth are only composed of parts which will be dissolved and diminished, as is further denoted by the small size of the letter. They also remark, with respect to the word צירוף, or combination of letters in this word, that the same letters also spell בabbrם ב-אברם, to denote that the world was created for the faithful, who alone see the glories of God in creation. The word צירוף is thus explained by Buxtorf: "Apud Cabalistas combinatio literarum est quarum æqualibus numeris vel mutua permutatione aliquid occulte et mystice significatur."

the 613 commandments, and have not learnt any of his evil practices<sup>1</sup>."

And sometimes, when the sense of the רמז or allegorical commentary is a mysterious and wonderful one, it is proper to conceal and hide it from the multitude, and not to reveal it,

<sup>1</sup> The Jews held, that this was the number of commandments obligatory upon them, vid. a note to Mr Bernard's Maimonides. Mr Bernard says, "The Rabbins count in the Mosaic law 613 commandments, 248 of which they call מצות עשה positive commandments, and 365 מצות נזורה negative commandments. Thus they say, תרוי"ג מצות נאמרו לו למשה בסיני, ש"ה לאוין, כמנין ימות החכמה: רמ"ה עשה כננד איבריו של אדם: 613 commandments have been enjoined to Moses in Sinai; 365 negative (commandments) according to the number of the days of the year, and 248 positive (commandments) corresponding to the (number of) the limbs of a man." Mendlessohn says, in his Jerusalem: "Ancient Judaism has no articles of faith. No one needed to be sworn to symbols, to subscribe articles of faith. Nay, we have not so much as a conception of what are called 'oaths of creed,' and according to the spirit of true Judaism we must hold them inadmissible. It was Maimonides who first conceived the thought of limiting the religion of his forefathers to a certain number of principles, 'in order,' says he, 'that religion, like all sciences, may have its fundamental ideas, from which all the rest may be deduced.' But he (Mendlessohn) here refers to the 13 articles of the Jewish Catechism, which answer to our 39 articles, and not to the 613 commandments mentioned above, which the Rabbins had counted up in the Mosaic law, long before these articles of faith were drawn up. Those 613 were commandments relating to practice, and not to belief."

Buxtorf, at the word גמטריא Geometria, has the following remarks: Geometria est Cabalæ species quâ ex diversarum vocum æquali numero eundem sensum colligunt; verbum ortum videtur ex Graeco γεωμετρια vel potius συμμετρια. Sic ex illis verbis, "Ecce ego adducaturus sum servum meum צמ"ה (Germen) Zach. iii. 8, colligunt per צמ"ה intelligendum esse Messiam, qui debebat appellari מנחם consolator, juxta illud 'Longe recessit a me מנהם' in Threnis, i. e. consolator aut Messias, ut idem Talmude explicatur (vid. Sanhedrim, fol. 98). Jam literæ vocis צמ"ה in numero valent 138, totidem etiam

except to the choicest among men, and then it is called סָכַד. And since we see from the many instances of Supreme Wisdom's intending one work for many purposes, that this may be set down as an attribute of Supreme Wisdom in general<sup>2</sup>, and we see in the works of creation in general, and in the limbs of living creatures in detail, that their Creator has intended each limb for several different purposes; for instance, he has made the nose for smelling, for breathing, for discharging the superfluous humour of the eyes, and to ornament the form of the face; and he has made the air for the living creatures to breathe, to convey the voice, for the blowing of the wind, for

vocis מְנֻחָם. Cum itaque Propheta dixit, ‘Adducam servum meum צִמָּח’ perinde est ac dixisset servum meum מְנֻחָם Messiam;” (so Aben Ezra and Kimchi on Zechariah iii. 8.) (Observe that the Hebrew method of notation is merely the addition as they stand of the numbers denoted by the separate letters, beginning at either end, because they have no scale of notation; thus, “תריג =  $3 + 10 + 200 + 400 = 613$ , and צמח =  $8 + 40 + 90 = 138$ , and מְנֻחָם =  $40 + 8 + 50 + 40 = 138$ , the letters having no local value). Again, in Gen. xxv. 21, וַתֵּהֶר רְבָקָה אֲשֶׁתָּו and “Rebekah his wife conceived,” or “Rebekah conceived אֲשֶׁתָּו” Now אֲשֶׁתָּו =  $6 + 400 + 300 + 1 = 707$ , and אֵשׂ וְקֹשׁ =  $300 + 100 + 6 + 300 + 1 = 707$ . So that אֲשֶׁתָּו is equivalent to אֵשׂ וְקֹשׁ fire and stubble, i. e. Jacob and Esau, as we find in Obad. 18, “בֵּית יַעֲקֹב אֵשׂ יְבִית עֵשָׂו לְקֹשׁ.” “The house of Jacob shall be fire, and the house of Esau stubble.” Again, in Gen. xi. 1, “And all the earth was of one speech,” שְׁפָה אֶחָת. Now שְׁפָה = 300 אֶחָת =  $400 + 8 + 1 + 5 + 80 + 300 = 794$ , and לְשׁוֹן הַקְדָּשָׁה = 300 + 4 + 100 + 5 + 50 + 6 + 300 + 30 = 795. The Rabbins make these two numbers the same (how I cannot presume to say), and draw from thence an equivalence between the “one speech,” of which all the world was before Babel, and the לְשׁוֹן הַקְדָּשָׁה, or Hebrew language. Again, Buxtorf says, “יְבָא שִׁילָה” veniet Shilo valet 358, quod et מִשְׁיחָה”; hence the identity between Shilo and the Messiah is established.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, “that this defines supreme wisdom.”

the descent of rain and dew, for the ascent of flame, &c.; (observe how he has intended a single thing for many uses, and so various!) such being the case, I say, it is not to be wondered at that the intention of this Supreme Wisdom in one expression should be for many different meanings to be expressed, and all of them true; and so say our sages, “One passage of scripture is to be reconditely interpreted in many senses,” and so they have said in the Zohar, at the text, “Who knoweth the spirit of man? &c.” which it is difficult to understand according to the פשט or simple interpretation. They said, **הָאִ קְרָא כַּמָּה גּוֹנִין אֵית בֵּיה :** **וְהִכְיָה כָּל מַלְיָה**, **דָּאוּרִיתָא** **בַּמָּה גּוֹנִין בְּכָל חֶדֶחָ וּבְכָל חֶדֶחָ יְאוֹת** i.e. “as for this passage, there are many meanings<sup>1</sup> in it, and thus it is with all the words of the law, there are many meanings in every single one of them, and all of them are right and good;” and accordingly they have interpreted this verse in many places in different ways.

And you will understand hereby, how it is proper to explain every expression uttered in prophecy or by inspiration of the Holy Spirit by several methods, viz. the **דָּרְשָׁן**, the **רָמֶז**, and the **סָוד**, and that all of them agree with the **פְּשָׁת**, since that is the most necessary of them all; but there is no difference between the truthfulness of the **פְּשָׁת** and that of the **דָּרְשָׁן**, since there is no doubt that everything that proceeds from the lips of him who speaks by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and every single movement of his lips intends a peculiar sense and meaning, and that there is not one unprofitable word among them, just as there will not be found among the works of the Creator a single thing devoid of all purpose or use; and for every one of the fibres of a fly’s wing, or an ant’s foot, there is a particular use, even though human skill would be wearied out with discovering them in detail, as is known to investigators in natural history; and consequently, there is no doubt that in every

<sup>1</sup> Literally, “colours.”

place which our sages have recondite interpreted according to their usual method, they have not shunned the plain interpretation, or neglected the primary meaning which is agreeable with the connexion of the passages, but that they have seen in their wisdom, that the method of simple interpretation is not sufficient for the purpose of the details of the passage, and the discrimination of them, as we have mentioned.

As for instance; the wise man has said, “A live dog is better off than a dead lion.” You will see in my commentary on this passage by the method of **וְשָׁבֵד**, that he here speaks after the opinion of those who deny the immortality of the soul; for according to them the same accidents happen to men and beasts, and the death of the one is as the death of the other; and since the most despised of animals, the dog, is esteemed above the carcase of a lion, the most noble among the beasts of the earth, in the opinion of those infidels the same is the case also with the sons of men, that the most afflicted and impoverished, despised and debased of men, he, I say, is more happy when alive than the most perfect of human kind after death, since that in their opinion is the destruction and annihilation of the soul, and that would be the very height of ignominy and disaster, (see my comment at the place); and consequently this passage is not at variance with what he says, that “The day of one’s death is better than that of one’s birth;” for there he speaks after the opinion of those who possess the true knowledge, who believe in the immortality of the soul, according to whose opinion death is to the righteous a going to real life, and truly desirable felicity, as I shall explain in its place. And as to the objection against the above passage which Rabbi Tenachom, the writer of recondite commentary, (Talmud, Schabbath, fol. xxx. page 1) has drawn from what Solomon himself says, “So that I was ready to praise the dead who are dead already, &c., and as better off than either, him who has not yet been,” that apparently he only said this

agreeably to the opinion of the unbelievers whom I have mentioned<sup>1</sup>, and how, he would say, should he, according to their perishable doctrine, praise the dead or him who is not yet born ? since according to their doctrine a live dog is better off than a dead lion. Now according to the simple interpretation of these passages they agree together. For such is the character of this perishable doctrine ; it perverts the paths of skill and investigation, and brings its professor into great perplexity, till he knows not which to choose, whether life or death ; for if he who denies the immortality of the soul, looks at the evil work done under the sun, it is quite likely that he should be disgusted with life, and say that death is better than life, or curse his birth-day as Job did ; many evils and distresses alarm him, and he has no comforter ; to-morrow he will have to go to his long home, and return to nothingness, as his expectation was nothingness ; or if (on the other hand) he lay to heart that there is no greater evil than utter annihilation and destruction, the conviction of good sense will as it were compel him to choose a life of distress and sorrow before the death and destruction of the soul ; and so sometimes he will say to himself, “Do all that is in the power of thy hand to do, since there is no judgment and no account ;” and sometimes he will be disgusted from doing anything great or small, and will say, “The race is not to the swift, &c.” (as is explained in the commentary) ; and thus his thoughts will trouble him, and sling his soul as in the hollow of a sling from confusion to faintness of heart ; and there will be for ever a strife in his mind between the judgment of the understanding and the tumults of nature ; and on this account “there is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked ;” for “like a troubled sea their heart cannot rest ;” and from this perplexity a man cannot be delivered except by a belief in the immortality of the soul and recompense in the life to come, as I shall explain in its place, and as I have

<sup>1</sup> i. e. as quoting their opinion.

written at length in my book on the Immortality of the Soul<sup>2</sup>. But all this belongs to the plain interpretation of the passage and its primary meaning. But it was not without an especial purpose that he who spake by the Holy Ghost chose the illustration of the dog and the lion ; and though it be truly conducive to poetic beauty, it is nevertheless probable that he also intended by it a secondary meaning, after the manner of שׁרֵשׁ, viz. to point out that with respect to cases of the law, they make it lawful to carry about on the sabbath to supply the necessity of a live dog, but not for a dead man, though he be a hero ; and that as Solomon mentions the superiority of a living body over a dead one, he meant to hint at what occurred to himself with respect to his illustrious father's body when the spirit had left it ; and this is what Rabbi Tenachom refinedly comments on this passage<sup>3</sup>.

Now as for myself, a humble individual, I have undertaken to explain this roll in the way most agreeable to the literal signification of the text, and the connexion and sequence of the subjects contained in it. For I have observed that nearly all the commentators who had preceded me have almost entirely failed in doing justice to their task of interpretation<sup>4</sup> ; and, (at the same time that I say it, I crave forgiveness from those great and glorious men<sup>5</sup>), I have not found in one of them an interpretation adequate to the correct explanation of the connexion of the verses of the book ; but according to their method, nearly every verse is spoken separately and unconnectedly ; and this would not be right in a private and insignificant author, and

<sup>2</sup> Mendlessohn's Phædon.

<sup>3</sup> There is probably a Talmudic story that David died on a sabbath-day, and his son would not permit funeral honors to be paid him on that day.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase יִצָּא יְדֵי חֹבֶתָנוּ signifies “egreditur manus officii sui,” i. e. liber est ab officio suo, satisfecit officio suo.

<sup>5</sup> i. e. with all due respect be it said.

much less in a wise king to whom testimony is borne, that he spake by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. And as if it were not enough for him to be destitute of connexion and arrangement, even great contradictions are found in the words of this able man, according to the commentaries of most of the writers upon him; sometimes they make him assert a proposition, and sometimes deny it, and sometimes pronounce right, and sometimes wrong, what is in itself exactly the same thing; so that Rabbi Aben Ezra noticed these contradictions at the verse, “vexation is better than laughter,” and says, that since the Scripture has borne testimony to Solomon, that after him there never will arise a wise man like him, we may be sure that there is no contradiction or inconsistency in his words, but that they are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge; and he has replied, though but briefly, to these instances of inconsistency; but my mind has not been set at rest by all that he has written there.

Now it is true that in the chapter <sup>במה מודקין</sup><sup>1</sup> we read, אמר ר' יהודה בר' דרב שמואל בר שלית משמי דרב בקשו חכמים לננו ספר קהלה מפני דבריו סותרים זה את זה, “Judah son of Rabbi Samuel son of Shilath said in the name of Rav, ‘The wise men sought to secrete the book of Ecclesiastes because its words were contradictory to each other.’” But our sages doubtless meant that they seem so to him who has only informed himself about them at first sight, and sought to hide it only on account of the danger that may arise from it to men of levity of mind; for these holy men have shewn us themselves the way to solve the difficulties and contradictions which occur in the words of the wise man, and accordingly it is added, מפני מה לא ננוזו מפני שתחלטו דברי תורה וסופה דברי תורה, i. e. “the reason why they did not secrete it was, because its beginning and end were consistent with the law;” and “therefore,” as Yarchi remarks in commenting on this

<sup>1</sup> Mischna, Schabbas, ch. x.

passage of the Talmud, “much more whatever is between the beginning and end.” And afterwards they discussed the explanation of the contradictions they found there; so that when they came to secrete also the book of Proverbs on account of the contradictions they found there, they came round and said, **ספר קהלה עיינין ואשכחים טעם ה כי נמי לעיןן** i. e. “we have looked closely into the book Coheleth, and discovered a meaning in it. Here, too<sup>2</sup>, let us look closely.” You see then that our sages, forbid it heaven, did not absolutely determine that Solomon’s words were at variance with each other; for this would be in the highest degree reprehensible in any intelligent man, and much more in one who spake by the Holy Ghost.

Consequently it becomes our duty to loose the bundles of doubts and undo the bands of the contradictions, which Aben Ezra has mentioned, in a manner agreeable to the simple interpretation of the text, according to the method I have pursued in my commentary, as is proper for one who undertakes to explain the primary meaning. And before I proceed to the interpretation, I shall premise to thee the known and approved rule in investigating the difficulties in the words of the book, viz. to recollect that all the things said in it do not represent the real opinion of king Solomon, but that sometimes he speaks after the manner of those who support two opposite sides in a discussion, an enquirer, and an answerer, as it is with those who are examining into difficult subjects; for those pursuing after truth by means of the exercise of the understanding, do not reach the object of their pursuit, unless they hear the contradictory arguments, and compare all the forms of the alleged doubts, and weigh in the balance and scales of justice the matter in debate and its converse, and bring the conflicting opinions into comparison, each beside each, until they distinguish truth from falsehood, and certain from doubtful. And since we have seen that the author of this roll wrote in

<sup>2</sup> i. e. in the Proverbs.

the way of investigation and open discussion, it is consistent with this, that no part of it should be attributed to himself<sup>1</sup>, except the law which he has laid down in the beginning of his discourse, before the doubts and contradictory arguments started up, and the conclusion he arrives at<sup>2</sup> after the discussion and the completion of the investigation. And this is the meaning of what our wise men said about the beginning and end of it being agreeable with the words of the law. And if we find any of the intervening passages apparently strange and repugnant to the law of truth, it is proper to attribute these to the part of the objector, and they will then be represented as the opinion of the infidel or the sceptic, so that the wise man may be saved from blame. And in this way is interpreted in the book Zohar<sup>3</sup> what is written in the 3rd chapter of this book,

<sup>1</sup> As his own opinion.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, “the ascent to agreement or accordance.”

<sup>3</sup> The *Zohar* is a most ancient Jewish commentary on the Pentateuch, which likewise contains much collateral matter, principally of a cabalistic and very recondite description. It is attributed to Rabbi Simeon, son of Jochanan, or, as he is called by contraction, “רשבינו”. He was the disciple of Rabbi Akiva, a Talmudic Rabbi, who was slain fifty years after the destruction of Jerusalem, in Adrian’s war against the Jews, about the year 120 A.D. The Jews say, that he lay hid in a cave twelve years, for fear of the emperor, and in the mean time wrote this book, which by the time he had finished it, was of such bulk, that R. Gedaliah, in the Schalscheleth, says, זה ההייבור הוא נמצא כל חד היה משאת גמל. “This composition was so very great, that if it was all of it collected together, it would be a camel’s burden.” In many places it is repugnant to the doctrines of the Talmud; but where it treats of those things which are not discussed there, it is looked on by the Rabbins as of paramount authority. The author nowhere mentions the Gemara, or any Talmudic book, and this has led the Jews to suppose the compilation of the Talmud to be of a later date. Mendlessohn expresses his surprize at meeting with anything like a simple interpretation in it. Its language and style are very abstruse and difficult, and it is more replete with Syriacisms than the Talmud.

viz. on the hypothesis that they are hard words and apparently (forgive us, heaven, for saying so) contradictory to the truth of providence and the immortality of the soul, which are the foundations of the law of truth; they say, that **לֹא חָמֵר** בְּלָמָה כִּי קָרָב מַגְנָמִי' כִּסְלָר חַיְנוּן מַלְין, **חַלְלָה** חַיְנוּן מַלְין בְּלָמָה כִּי קָרָב מַגְנָמִי' כִּסְלָר חַיְנוּן מַלְין דַּטְפָּסָר, דַּעֲמָה, וְלֹא מַרְוָה כִּי מִקְרָה סַלְסָלָה בְּכָמָס וְגַו' טַפְסָר, דַּלְלָה יְשֻׁעָן וְלֹא יִמְתְּכָלֵן נַחֲמָתָה חַמְרִי דַּסְמָרָה עַלְמָחָה חַוִּיל נַמְקָרָה, וּקְבָ"ה כִּי חַסְגָּה עַלְמָיו, **חַלְלָה** מִקְרָה סַלְסָלָה וְמִקְרָה בְּכָמָס, וְמִקְרָה חַדְדָה וְגַו', וְכֵד בְּלָמָה חַסְכִּיל בְּלָיְנוּן טַפְסָר וְמִקְרָה לֹה, קָרִי לְפָוָן נַמָּס, וְלָיְנוּן עַדְיִי גַּמְמִיָּהוּ נַמָּס מַמָּס וְחַמְרִי לֹה, Solomon did not speak this passage in his own person, like the rest of his words; but he is here repeating the words of ignorant men of the world, who said so; and what did they say? ‘That the same accidents happen to men and beasts, &c.; ignorant that they are, and not knowing common sense, in that they say that this world goes by chance, and that the Holy One takes no care about it, but that ‘the accidents of men and beasts are the same, and one chance happens to both of them,’ and since Solomon knew them to be ignorant in that they said so, he calls them beasts, for that they made themselves mere beasts in that they said these words.” You will see by referring to the place that the writer has commented on the connexion of these passages in a method approaching to the simple method of interpretation.

But still I in my humility have applied myself to interpret them after another manner; for after I had meditated on all this section from the beginning of it to its end, the simple sense of the passage seemed to be, that the most strong and certain proof of the immortality of the soul, and recompence in the life to come, was to be derived from the existence of wrong and violence in the world, viz. that as for the place of justice, wickedness was there, &c. For he who believes in the attri-

butes of God and his providence, cannot escape from one of these alternatives, either to believe that souls exist after death, and that there is hereafter a time of account for every action, whether good or bad, or<sup>1</sup>, to impute evil and wrong to the breast of the blessed God. This is a proof which it is impossible to evade. But the nature of the soul and its formation is not by itself quite so strong a proof; for the caviller may perhaps choose to deny the superiority of man over the beast, and argue that both have the same breath. (See my commentary at the place, on chap. iii.) And in my opinion this interpretation of mine is more in accordance with the connexion of the passage, and agreeable to what is found in subsequent sections of this book; for the things there said appear at first sight more difficult and more remote from the radical principles of the law of truth even than what is said in the third chapter. And by the help of the blessed God I have laboured and found a right way, and, as I think, a true one, to dispose of every difficulty in those sections, and to explain the words of the wise king in a method by which they will be found to be not opposing, but strengthening the foundation of the law of truth.

<sup>2</sup>Now our Rabbins of blessed memory discussed carefully by the methods mentioned above whichever of his expressions are contradictory to one another. They say, “It is written, ‘Vexation is better than laughter,’ and again it is written, ‘I said of laughter, *מהול דוא*.’ It is written, ‘I praised mirth,’ and again it is written, ‘I said of mirth, What doeth it?’ There is no contradiction or inconsistency in saying, ‘Vexation is better than laughter,’ i. e. ‘better is the vexation wherewith God is vexed against the righteous than the laughter wherewith the Deity laughs at the wicked in this world,’ and in saying likewise, ‘I said of laughter, *מהיל דוא*,’<sup>3</sup> i. e. the laughter wherewith

<sup>1</sup> He inserts, “Forgive us, heaven, for saying it.”

<sup>2</sup> For the original of this passage, see page 95.

<sup>3</sup> It is excellent.

the Deity laughs with the righteous in the world to come; and again in saying, ‘I was praising mirth,’ i. e. the mirth of the commandment, and in saying likewise, ‘Of mirth I said, What doeth it?’ i. e. the mirth, not of the commandment, &c.” It is clear from these their words that they interpreted מהולל as a word expressing praise, whereas, as Yarchi has explained it, and according to the simple interpretation of the passage, its sense will be as though it were derived from the word הוללות in the phrase **הוֹלָלֶת וְסִכְלָות**; and so it appears from what is clearly implied by the connexion of the sentences, “ I said in my heart, Come now, I will try thee with mirth, and enjoy pleasure, and, behold, this also was in vain.” “ I said of laughter, מהולל הוא, and of mirth, What doeth it?” and consequently it is evident that he is reprobating laughter, and saying of it that it is a thing in which there is no substantial good; but that our sages of blessed memory commented thus in consequence of the wise man’s having employed the word מהולל in this place, since its signification is sometimes that of praise and high excellence, as מהולל שם יהוה (Ps. cxlv. 3, and ex. 3), and sometimes of folly and want of understanding, so that it would seem that the secondary sense is, that sometimes laughter is excellent, and to be praised. But it is impossible to speak of laughter as “of the commandment,” for they had already said, “The Shechinah dwells not in the midst of laughter<sup>4</sup>;” which Yarchi explains by saying that “the mind

<sup>4</sup> The passage here alluded to is in Bab. Talmud, Psachim, Lect. x. and is as follows: **לְדוֹד מִזְמָרָר, מַלְמָד שְׁרָתָה עַלְיוֹ שְׁכִינָה וְאַחֲרָה**: **כִּי צָהָר שִׁירָה, כִּי זָהָר לְדוֹד, מַלְמָד שָׁמַר שִׁירָה וְאַחֲרָה** אמר שירָה, **כִּי זָהָר לְדוֹד, מַלְמָד שְׁרָתָה עַלְיוֹ שְׁכִינָה, לְמַדֵּךְ שָׁאוֹן הַשְׁכִינָה שְׁוֹרָה לֹא מַתוֹךְ עַצְלָות וְלֹא מַתוֹךְ עַצְבּוֹת וְלֹא מַתוֹךְ שְׁחֹק וְלֹא מַתוֹךְ קְלָתָה-רָאשׁ וְלֹא מַתוֹךְ דְּבָרִים בְּטָלִים אֶלָּא מַתוֹךְ דְּבָר שְׁמָחָה שֶׁל מַצּוֹה שֶׁנָאָמַר וְעַתָּה קָחֵי לֵי מִנְגָן וַיְהִי בָנָנוּ הַמִּנְגָן וַתְהִי עַלְיוֹן יְדֵ יהָוָה.**

That is to say, “Unto David a Psalm.” This informs us that

of the laughing person is not well regulated, and though he be not guilty of scorning, still he has no regulation of mind ;” where it seems that his meaning was to explain why our sages praised what they called “the laughter of the commandment,” and again found fault with it ; and that he means that laughter in a child of man was condemned by them at all events, because it engrosses and unsettles the human mind. And you may observe with surprise that the sages have not thought proper to praise laughter in a child of man, and nevertheless have attributed it to the Creator, blessed be his name, (they say, “I said of laughter, **מהיל דהוא**, i. e. the laughter wherewith the Deity laughs with the saints ;” and so of vexation they say, “The vexation wherewith God is vexed with the righteous, &c.”) because in the case of a man who laughs or is vexed, his mind is not well regulated or settled in him, and through means of laughter and vexation he proceeds to folly and madness, and therefore in a human bosom they are culpable ; but

that the Schechinah dwelt upon him (first), and that after that he uttered the song of praise : “A Psalm unto David.” This informs us that he sung the song of praise first, and then the Schechinah dwelt upon him afterwards ; for the Schechinah dwells neither amidst apathy nor amidst melancholy, laughter, levity, or idle prattling, but amidst the cheerfulness of the commandment ; (i. e. arising from the fulfilling of it, or in accordance with, and in subordination to it) ; for it is written, “But now bring me a minstrel ;” “and it came to pass when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.” It is true, as Mendlessohn says, that the Rabbins are here guilty of apparent inconsistency ; but I think it is clear that where they spoke in the Medrasch on Ecclesiastes, of “the laughter of, or agreeable to, the commandment,” they meant exactly the same as what they express in the above passage of the Talmud, by “the cheerfulness (**שמחה**) of the commandment ;” which is so continually recommended throughout the book of Ecclesiastes ; just as where they speak of the “laughter of the Deity with the saints in the world to come,” they can only mean his sublime joy, and undisturbed felicity, not the convulsion which we call laughter.

the great God is not affected by them at all, but he, so to speak, laughs in righteousness, and is vexed in judgment in his simple will, without suffering<sup>1</sup> diminution or change in any of his attributes; and consequently in every place where the scripture praises laughter or vexation, it is proper that you should refer it as to its secondary sense to the blessed God, because with him those qualities are free from all defect or cause of blame. Wherefore our sages in their recondite commentary have referred the word מהולל to the laughter of the Holy One with his saints in the world to come; and whereas this laughter is highly indeed to be praised, he says in conclusion, of the laughter which is not of the commandment, "What doeth it?" For it is good to restrain oneself from that paltry mirth<sup>2</sup>. And their recondite commentary on the verse, "Vexation is better than laughter," is very much in accordance with my explication of the passage; for the primary meaning there is, as you will see hereafter in my commentary, that the intelligent poor man, of whom he has spoken in the preceding verses, is not altogether destitute of happiness, as the mass of fools imagine; for in truth man knows not what is good for him in the term of his life under the sun, and sometimes his temporary prosperity will be to his hurt; and on this account he says, "Vexation is better than laughter," for in gloominess of looks the heart may be cheerful. He means that sadness is not always evil, nor laughter absolutely good for man, and sometimes that the heart is happy when the face is sorrowful; but because it is not proper to commend vexation in a child of man, because this passion wounds his soul, and brings him under "the category<sup>3</sup> of error," as our sages say, on this account our sages interpreted it of the

<sup>1</sup> Forgive us the thought. <sup>2</sup> End of the specimen, vide p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> In Perke Avoth, Lect. 3. רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אֹמֵר שְׁחוֹק וְקָלוֹת רָאשׁ מְרֻגְלִין אֶת הָאָדָם לְעָרֹה. Rabbi Akivah said, "Laughter and levity of mind accustom men to lewdness."

vexation of providence against the righteous in this world ; for even if the Deity be vexed against the wise poor man, and he seems to the sons of men as though he were altogether destitute of happiness and struggling against life ; still it is better for him to be the object of this vexation, than of the laughter wherewith God laughs against the wicked, who prospers in his hour, and eats his only portion in this world.

And now let us proceed to the contradictions which Aben Ezra mentions ; and we shall reply to them according to our method in the commentary on the text, viz. according to the simple interpretation of it.

Now the first difficulty is in the use of the word **כֹּבֶד**. It is written, “Vexation is better than laughter,” and the contrary of this, “Vexation rests in the bosom of fools;” and so “In much wisdom is much vexation,” and its opposite, “Put away vexation from thy heart.” Now the word **כֹּבֶד** is used in Hebrew<sup>1</sup> for the boiling wrath of the mind and its indignation against an act of wrong and violence. For it is part of the nature of the intelligent soul to experience pain in beholding oppression of the poor and perversion of judgment and justice ; and to put on the garment of indignation to take vengeance on him who does the wrong. And this outrage may be either a real or only a seeming one ; for sometimes a man is vexed with his neighbour from supposing that he has done him wrong or violence when such is not the case, but the thing was for his good. Now vexation against real wrong is proper and laudable in itself, as is clear to every intelligent man ; though as respects the feelings of the heart, the man who gives way to vexation cannot escape pain and suffering, and his mind is not in a settled state as it should be ; and thus it is that vexation brings a man “under the category of error,” as we have said ; and it is quite proper for a man to try with all his might to hate evil and abominate violence, and to

<sup>1</sup> As a noun.

take vengeance on the perfidious, provided only that he continue free from all passion or ebullition of feeling whatever, if this be possible for one born of woman; for this is a part of that middle course which our sages have so highly commended<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Vid. Maimonides, *Yad Hachazakah*, "Precepts on the Government of the Temper," Chap. I. § 3, p. 151, in Mr Bernard's translation:—

"III. But between each disposition and the disposition opposed to it [namely] that at the other extreme, there are intermediate dispositions, which are also in opposition to each other.

"IV. The two opposite extremes in different dispositions, are not "the right way; nor does it become a man to proceed in the same, "nor to discipline himself to the same; if, therefore, he finds that he "is inclined towards one of them by his nature, or that he is disposed "to become inclined towards one of them, or that he has already "acquired one of them and practised the same, he ought to turn back "for the better, and to proceed in the way of the good which is the "right way.

"V. Now the right way is that middle state, which is found in all "the dispositions of man, namely, that disposition which is equally "remote from the two extremes, so that it is not nearer to the one "[extreme] than it is to the other. The sages of old have therefore "directed, that a man should always estimate (i. e. that he should be "aware of the power or force of) his dispositions, and that he should "calculate and direct the same, [so as to keep] the intermediate way, "to the end that he may preserve a perfect harmony [even] in his "bodily constitution.

"VI. For instance, he ought neither to be a passionate and irritable "man, nor yet like a dead man who has no feeling at all; but [he "should keep] between [these two extremes]; so as never to be irritated, except by some serious matter, such as ought to be resented, "in order that the same thing may not be done a second time. He "ought likewise to wish for such things only as the body stands in "need of, and without which it is not possible to subsist, just as it "is said: 'The righteous eateth to the satisfying of the soul,' (Prov. "xiii. 25). Again, he ought not to toil too much in his business, "unless [it be] to obtain those things which are necessary for his "temporary life, just as it is said, 'A little that a righteous man hath "is better,' (Ps. xxxvii. 16). Neither ought he to shut his hand, nor

"to

But vexation against only apparent violence is folly. It arises from want of knowledge, and dwells chiefly in the bosom of fools, because they cannot distinguish between good and evil. And now all these verses will be seen to be plain and straightforward. He says, “Vexation is better than laughter;” i. e. (as we have observed above) it is better for the poor but wise man mentioned in the preceding verses to suffer vexation and annoyance at seeing violence and oppression, than to indulge in the laughter of the wicked who fling arrows of death, and say, Are we not in sport? But in chapter vi. he speaks

“to waste all his mammon; but he ought to give alms in proportion  
“to the means he possesses, and also to lend to him who stands in  
“need, as becomes [a generous man]. Moreover, he ought to be neither  
“a jocose or a gay man, nor a sullen or melancholy man; but should  
“always manifest a pleasing cheerfulness, and a friendly countenance;  
“and so it ought to be with regard to all his other dispositions; this  
“way being the way of the wise.

“VII. The man whose dispositions are altogether modified and intermediate, is called חכם a wise man; but he who is still more careful about himself, and who [occasionally and seasonably] declines somewhat from intermediate dispositions towards the one side or the other, is called תְּפִלָּה a pious man.

“VIII. For instance, if one were to recede from haughtiness of mind so far as [to reach] the opposite extreme, and [consequently] become an exceedingly humble-minded man, one would then be called a pious man, this being the virtue of piety; but if one were to recede [from it] as far as the middle [point] only, and become an unassuming man, one would be called a wise man, this being the virtue of wisdom; and so it would be with all other dispositions.

“IX. Now the pious men of old used [occasionally] to bend their dispositions from the intermediate way, towards the two extremes; “one disposition they would bend towards the lowest extreme, and “again another disposition they would urge on towards the highest “extreme, [as the case might require]; now this is [said to be] more “even than [what] the line of justice [would require].

“X. With regard, however, to ourselves, we are commanded to walk in the intermediate ways, which are the ways of the good and of the righteous.”

against him who murmurs against the providence of God in this world, and does not take into consideration the termination of the thing, and what shall be in the end of it. He had said in the preceding verse, "Be not quickly excitable in thy spirit to vexation, &c." as much as to say, Since all the ways of God are righteousness and judgment, it follows that the tranquillity of the wicked, and the chastisement of the just in this world, is not really evil (forgive us heaven for the thought); for God is glorified by it; but only seemingly evil to the sons of men who lack understanding. Therefore be not quickly excitable to vexation at the accidents of the sons of men, for this sort of vexation is cherished only in the bosom of fools. As to what he says, "that in much philosophy is much vexation," that is said with reference to his meaning that it is impossible for man to escape distress and sorrow altogether, when he observes how man oppresses his neighbour, and that the wicked swallows up him who is more righteous than himself; and from increase of wisdom, a man becomes more sensitive to wrong and violence, and thereby more vexation is generated; for only one among a thousand can be found who can always command his temper so as not to be vexed. But at the end of the book he advises man to dispel vexation from his heart, and to strengthen himself against the tumults of nature with all his might. Now there is a great difference between the precepts of wisdom, and the practice of the wise man. For wisdom commands to do good, and to depart from evil, and prescribes by way of an instance of it, "Remove vexation entirely from thy heart;" meaning, that if the liberty and power to do so had been committed to man, it were proper for him to shun the distress and perturbation of vexation altogether. But the wise man, as being a mere human creature, is not free from defect by reason of his humanity, and he is the wisest whose defects are the fewest; and since it is one of the consequences of investigation and reflection, to increase

our sensibility to harm and benefit, and to enlarge our perceptions of the distinctions of good and evil, it is quite consistent that he should say, that “in much philosophy is much vexation.”

And the second contradiction which Aben Ezra mentions is, that it is written, that “that which is good, that which is excellent, is to eat and drink,” and the contrary of this, “It is good to go to the house of mourning.” According to the explanation I have given from the connexion of the verses, there is no contradiction at all here; it is evidently more good and excellent for a man “to eat and drink, and see good done to others by his labour,” than that he should labour for wind, and “eat all his days in the dark, and be vexed, and suffer illness and peevishness.” And nevertheless going to the house of mourning is not always bad, nor going to the house of feasting always good and advantageous for man; and this is all the meaning of the passage where he says, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to that of feasting,” as I shall by God’s help explain at the place.

The third contradiction is one which our sages have mentioned, that it is written, “I praised mirth,” and the contrary of this, “I said of mirth, What avails it?” And here we have already had their explanation, where they speak of what they call “the laughter of the commandment,” as we have mentioned. And besides as to what he says of mirth, viz. “What avails it?” the fact is, he had wished to find perfect good and happiness for man in mirth, and drinking, and song, and after he had made trial also of this method, he repented and said of laughter, It is mad, and of mirth, What doeth it?

The fourth contradiction is that we have, “What advantage has the wise man above the fool?” and the contrary of this, “Wisdom has an advantage over folly.” Now I have noticed in the book Zohar a recondite comment on this latter verse, nearly approaching to a simple commentary, and this is surprizing.

ל' ח'יס פתח ווואר —  
 ור'ית' ח'ני ס'יס יתרכז ל'חכמ'ן ען ס'סכלות וגומר, נ'חכמ'ן ח'ת ר'ס'תכלנו  
 ב'ח'יל' דס'סכל'ה מל'כ'ה וו'ס'גנ'ה נ'ח'מ'ת'ה ס'ג'יה ד'ל', וו'ס'ת'ה מ'ל'י נ'ג'ו  
 ג'נו ה'יכל'ה ק'ד'יש'ה, פ'ל', ק'רו' ח'ית ל'ס'ת'כ'ל'ה ד'י', ח'מ'ה' ח'וד' וו'ר'ית'  
 ח'ני ו'כ' ס'ה'ר ג'נו ע'ל'מ'ה ל'ע י'ד'ע' ו'ל'ע' ח'מ'ן', א'פ'יל'ו מ'ל'ן ל'ל'ע' י'ד'ע'  
 ח'מ'ת'ה ח'ן י'מו'י ו'ל'ע' ח'ס'ג'ה נ'ה י'ד'ע' ס'יס' י'תרכז ל'חכמ'ן ען ס'סכל'ות  
 כ'יתרכז ס'ה'ר מ'ן ס'ח'ס', ו'ס'ו' ס'נ'מ' ג'ר'מ', ו'ו'יר' ר'חו'ת' ח'ני ח'ל'ן פ'כ'  
 ת'ה'נ'ה כ', וו'ר'ית' ח'ני ס'יס' י'תרכז ל'חכמ'ן מ'ן ס'סכל'ות כ'לו'ר' מ'ן  
 ס'סכל'ות ח'מ'ה ח'ת' ת'וע'ל'ת'ה ל'ח'מ'ת'ה, ד'ח'מ'ל'ה ל'ע ח'ס'ת'כ'ה ס'ט'ו'ת'ה ג'ע'ל'מ'ה  
 ל'ע ח'ס'ת'מ'וד'ע ח'מ'ת'ה ו'ו'ל', ו'ת'ה'נ' ח'ו'כ'ה הו' ע'ל' נ'ס ד'ז'ו'ל'ק'  
 ח'מ'ת'ה ל'מ'ל'ק' מ'ן ס'ט'ו'ת' ו'ו'מ'נד'ע ל'ה' ב'ג'ן ד'חו'ת' ת'וע'ל'ת'ה ל'ח'מ'ת' ג'ג'י'  
 כ'מ'ס ד'חו'ת' ת'וע'ל'ת'ה ג'ה'רו'ה מ'ח'ס'ו'ה, ד'ח'מ'ל'ה ח'ס'ו'ה ל'ע ח'ס'ת'מ'וד'ע  
 נ'ה'ו'ה ו'ל'ע' ח'ת'ה פ'ע'ו'ל'ת'ה ג'ע'ל'מ'ה מ'ג'י', כ', ת'ק'ינ'ה ד'חו'רו'ה מ'ה' פ'יח'  
 ח'ו'כ'מ'ה ו'ו'ל'מ'ל'ה ח'ו'כ'מ'ה ל'ע ח'ס'ת'מ'וד'ע ח'ו'רו'ה, ח'וד' ר'ב' י'נ'ק' מ'ס'ל' מ'ת'יק'ה  
 ב'מ'ר ל'ל'ע' י'ד'ע' ח'י'ס ט'ע'מ'ה ד'מ'ת'יק'ה עד ד'ט'ע' מ'ר'יו' מ'ל'ן ע'כ'יד' ל'ס'ו' מ'ת'יק'ה  
 ס'וי' ח'וד'ר פ'ל', מ'ר'יו' ו'ס'י'נו' ד'כ'ת'יכ' (ק'ב'ל'ת ו') נ'ס ח'ז' ו'ש'ו'ות' ו'ס'  
 "Rabbi Chaiim opened his mouth and said, 'As to the passage, I saw that wisdom has a superiority over folly, &c. in many places I have made myself acquainted with the words of king Solomon, and contemplated the great wisdom which was his; and I have found that he concealed his words in the innermost recesses as it were of a holy temple<sup>1</sup>. This passage too is such that it must be looked into. Why does he say, I have seen, as if the rest of the sons of men do not know or perceive it? even he who has not known wisdom all his life, and has not contemplated it, knows that wisdom has a superiority over folly, as light has over darkness; but Solomon praises himself, and says, I have seen; but in so saying he teaches'”—and so on. “But I have seen that wisdom has an advantage over folly, i. e. that absolutely from folly is derived an advantage to wisdom, since if there were no folly in the

<sup>1</sup> That is, that he wrote in a very mysterious manner.

world, wisdom and its lessons would not be appreciated; and he means to teach that it is necessary for a son of man who would learn wisdom, to learn from folly and to be acquainted with it, because that advantage accrues to wisdom by means of it, like the advantage which accrues to light from darkness, since but for darkness light would not be perceived to be light, nor any effect from it come into the world,""—and so on,—“and the beauty of whiteness, wherein does it consist? in (its contrast to) blackness; and but for blackness, whiteness would not be appreciated.” Rabbi Isaac gives an illustration from the relation of bitter to sweet, since no one appreciates the taste of sweetness, till he have tasted bitterness. ‘What has made this to be sweetness? we must say, that bitterness has.’ And this is the meaning of what is written, ‘He has set this over against the other,’ &c.” Quem vide. But here, too, according to the explanation I shall by God’s help there give, according to the simple interpretation of the text, there is no contradiction at all. But on the contrary, the one was an expression of surprise on the part of the wise man, “I have seen that in respect of intelligence the wise man has an advantage over the fool, but nevertheless I perceive that in respect of chance they are all on an equality, and the same chance happens to both of them!” (see my commentary on this passage.) And again, as for his expression, “What advantage has the wise man over the fool?” this is merely an argument of the murmuring objectors, as by God’s help I shall explain.

As for the fifth contradiction, our sages have mentioned it. “I praised the dead, &c.” and the contrary of this, “that a live dog is better than a dead lion.” I have already gone to some length upon this above.

The sixth contradiction is, that “there is no work, or device, or knowledge, or wisdom in the grave,” and the contrary of this, that “there is a time for every work there.” I have

gone to some length on these passages in my commentary; and, according to my method, both of them really refer to one subject, the immortality of the soul, and recompence in the life to come; and as to his expression **כִּי אֵין מְעַתָּה** its interpretation is, “if there be no work, &c.” (See my commentary at the place; — for there is no good in repetition.)

And so with regard to the seventh and eighth contradictions, if you will acquaint yourself with my commentary on them, you will see and understand that his expression, “And shall not good happen to the wicked, &c.” is not at all repugnant to his remark, “There is the case of a bad man prolonging his days in his injustice;” for the former verse, as explained from those preceding it, is to be read with a note of interrogation. “Why should not the wicked attain at least to apparent prosperity in this world?” and consequently it is not repugnant to the latter verse, “There is the case,” &c.; besides, this verse is spoken with reference to the administration of kingdoms, as I have there explained. And so in saying, “It shall be good to the fearers of God,” he speaks of the true good and prosperity in the world to come, as is there set forth; and in his saying that “There are bad men to whom it happens as if they had done the work of the just, &c.” he speaks of the unsatisfactory state of things under the sun; and the beginning of the passage is, “There is an unsatisfactory thing which takes place under the sun, that there are just men to whom it happens as if they had done the work of the wicked,” &c.

Now the reader will see in this my commentary, that I have not paid any attention to the divisions of chapter and verse in ordinary use among us. And in this respect I have walked in the steps of former commentators; for most of them did not regard the pauses of the chapters and verses. For these signs are received among our people as intended for no other purpose but that of saving trouble to the reader in seeking a

verse or word in the bible<sup>1</sup>; not for that of judging by means of them at what place a subject begins or where it ends; but the liberty was allowed to every commentator of placing those marks<sup>2</sup> according to his own plan in the interpretation of the sense; and you will see many passages of this roll where it is impossible, on any of the interpretations, for the end of the sense of the subjects to coincide with the present places of the marks. Now at first it occurred to me to place the signs of the chapters and verses in the places agreeable with my interpretation. But since I had observed that in the index<sup>3</sup> of the Talmud, the printers have proceeded with reference to the signs in ordinary use among us, and I was afraid to make a change which might only cause trouble to the reader, when he wishes to discover a passage he seeks for; and I also observed that sometimes they had altered the place of a pause for a good reason<sup>4</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> This is a very important remark of our author's. From the scrupulous exactness of Mendlessohn in deviating in no instance from the Masoretic text, either in this roll, or in the Pentateuch, it is quite clear that he agreed with the opinion of all the literary authorities of his own nation, (Elias Levita alone excepted), in holding the extreme antiquity of the system of points, and therefore of the divisions of chapter and verse, which form a part of it, and in ascribing them to Ezra and his coadjutors, who, it is said, fearing that the pronunciation and interpretation of the sacred text might be entirely lost in case of the recurrence of such national calamities as the Babylonish captivity, which had already occasioned a great corruption of the Jewish language, took these means to perpetuate it. Nevertheless, he gives this decided opinion about the pauses of chapter and verse.

<sup>2</sup> ציון, a mark.

<sup>3</sup> The index of the Talmud here spoken of is an index of the passages of scripture quoted in it.

<sup>4</sup> There are several books in the Bible, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Lamentations, and Malachi, which end with a harsh expression; and in all the Hebrew Bibles the preceding verse εὐφημιας χαρω is printed over again, and so read in all the synagogues. They are thus designated: ♀ stands for Isaiah; ק for קינה, or Lamentations; ק for קהילת, or the Preacher; and ת for תרי עשר, 2 + 10 = 12, i. e. the minor pro-

viz. not to stop at a harsh expression ; I was induced by these considerations to leave the marks in their original places<sup>5</sup>.

And know, dear reader, that it is not out of the stores of my own mind that I have produced all the things stated in this my Commentary, but that the greater part of them I have collected from other books of preceding authors ; and the book of the תְּכִלָּת יְפֵי<sup>6</sup> of Rabbi Solomon<sup>7</sup> has been a help and advantage to me in the commentary on words, and the grammar of the language ; and in that on the sense of the text, I have closely followed those great commentators, Yarchi and Aben Ezra, except in places where it was necessary to differ from them ; and in every place where I have found their method agreeable with the simple sense of the words, and the original intention of the wise king, I have put down their words, word for word, without alteration or change ; and because our wise men have counselled us to receive truth from whoever speaks it, I have also sought in the works<sup>8</sup> of the commentators who are not of the sons of Israel ; and wherever I found in their mouths a word of truth, I offered it to the Lord, and it became holy.

phets, of which Malachi is last, (תְּרֵי being Chaldee for two). These letters are formed into one word קְרִית, and we find in the Masoretic notes at the end of each of these books סִימָן קְרִית written.)

<sup>5</sup> But at the same time he has pointed out where the divisions would be according to his plan.

<sup>6</sup> Perfection of beauty.

<sup>7</sup> This book of R. Solomon was written in A.D. 1490, and printed in 1567, at Salonica.

<sup>8</sup> Literally, "sacks," in allusion to Gen. xliv. 12.